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assurance that his Denis was fit for the work, arranged for a two year's course, and then returned to his apron, his glasses and grinding-wheel. Turned loose in the cruel town at the expiration of that period, young Denis proved to be a reckless, wild and dissipated boy. As he said long after, he caused nothing but pain to his father and sorrow to his mother while they lived. He turned ultra-radical, courted the society of great ladies, and married a shop-girl to whom he was kind but untrue, for he had two mistresses. His keen, ready wit commended him to the rich, his coarse gluttony and rather vulgar manners were overlooked for the contributions of information, criticism and humor which he made to the life of his day. He

was as industrious as any dull clod of a peasant and earned a fairly steady subsistence for his family by writing about anything and everything for which publishers would pay. And he wrote so well that he became the most representative intellect of his time, with a brain gathering and running together into one great sea of erudition; philosophy, science, literature and the fine arts. His atheism, avowed rather than felt, was confused, not definite; he complacently admitted that he was dubbed the philosopher; but his philosophy was partly a loose scheme of material things, concerned little or not at all with the unfolding of origins and plan in the universe, partly a cloudy metaphysic.

*William Milligan Sloane*

*(To be continued)*

## SLIGHTED MATERIAL

BY ROSALIE M. JONAS

THEY say in the South: to know the Negro you must have been "raised" with him.

This is not true of the unprogressive ex-master and the slowly progressing ex-slave. For, as the freedman seeks to raise himself to the common level of American citizenship, the barrier of race prejudice is built more and more jealously between them. But Nature is a keen humorist, and in that South where conditions are practically unchanged, through the subtle influences of climate or companionship or what not, she has molded her tanned and black children of both races into a kinship closer than most of them realize or some of them would acknowledge.

In this sense, to know the Negro you must have been "raised" with him, lived beside him through the receptive days of childhood, under the same fervid sun, in the same colorful southern atmosphere. One might go even further and say: to know the South you must have been "raised" with the Negro. For while the little white child sits listening dumbly to its countless song-birds, insensitive to the appeal of his garrulous little "brothers" of the field and forest, the little "nigger" at his side mimics the mocking bird, translates for him the language of the coon, the 'possum, the fox, the horse, the cow, the chickens with a sense of simple human fellowship and a sympathetic humor which even La Fontaine and later Rostand, Kipling and our own gentle Joel Chandler Harris give us but artificially by comparison. For none of these have gone—perhaps none of our "superior" race can ever go—as simply, as directly, so with "the heart of a little child" to Nature. And of all the aliens grafted on the South from France, Spain and Ireland, everywhere, the Negro is the one exotic whose roots, so fiercely wrenched from their native soil, have taken firmest hold.

Enslaved by man, the Southern land adopted him with tenderness and warmth. And he grew so close to her that he became her spokesman, her interpreter. And those of us on whom she looked more coldly, for our sins, have had to get our inspiration through her "colored" medium, to whom we turned instinctively—but in our own crass ignorance, despised. We only saw his "funny" side

—God help us! Or at most patted him on the head and told sentimental tales of his affection and fidelity and our tolerant appreciation of these qualities, that were well within the limits of our own narrow prejudices. With smut upon our vacant faces, vulgar horse-play and tuneless "coon-songs" we have made pretense to represent the Minstrel of the South—the only real Minstrel this noise-deafened country has ever known! And because we had neither humanity enough to give him fair play for the full development of his native genius, nor culture enough to see him as the most inspiring artistic "material" that ever spendthrift dullards have wasted—Art herself, now, to shame us, is holding out her hand to him and thrusting us aside.

From over-seas and in the words of one of the world's great writers came the intelligent recognition of that exquisite prose-poem "The Souls of Black Folk" by W. E. B. du Bois. . . . "It is the greatest piece of literature—perhaps the only piece of literature published in this generation, in America" was the verdict. And now another well-known genius—a woman this time and herself an inspired Minstrel, coming to us recently from France, saw at once the Negro's artistic value and in politely concealed amazement exclaimed at our blindness: "But all you have to give the world in Art that is new—that is *American*—it is your Nigair!"

One may imagine the howl of pained egotism and derision that would greet such words here. "What! The Nigger artistic!" cries the outraged Southerner. "I don't know what you mean. He's nuthin' but a joke." And so, even with all the treasure George Cable has dug up for us and a few others have sighted, the greater part of the picturesque and dramatic "material" of that "old South" that awaits revival by the new spirit of intellectual democracy lies still unseen around us.

"The Negro poetic?" we can hear some of our brave Free-Versifiers exclaim scornfully "why, he's rhythmical, tuneful—Impossible!" And then, if the devil move them, they will rush off and "do him up" in brutal discords that show artlessly the artless savage in themselves. "The Coon dramatic?"

will howl the Movie audience, with a hearty bray. And the lady from Hackensack who sings "The End of a Perfect Day" so touchingly can not be convinced that (musically) he could ever reach that height. As for the box-holder at the Metropolitan, he can't see him at all, for the crash and confusion of the "new" music. . . and of such is the kingdom of Art in America!

Of all our crimes against the Negro our most unforgivable will be, to force this kind of culture and criticism upon him. For heaven's sake let us keep our hands off him and get out of his light! Give him the chance to realize himself and to select, according to his taste or talent, his own artistic nourishment and stimulus. Do not let us hamper him with our own trifling intellectual baggage, but by a more intelligent attitude of our own let us teach him to respect what is *distinctive* in him and not force him to mistrust it by gazing at him forever with the yokel's grin of vacant derision at what is foreign to himself!

If we had been less provincial ourselves, we would not for so long have overlooked the inestimable value of his naïve and original expression, nor, at best, sought to convince him that to simply "go in the herd" with us would be an artistic gain for him. This last danger becomes more and more imminent. We have so long laughed at him—not *with* him—so long refused him recognition, misinterpreted and belittled him, that it is small wonder he is growing doubtful, self-conscious, ashamed of any difference from us in himself. And now our tardy conscientiousness may finish what our dull egotism began—and kill outright the artist in him that we overlooked and stunted.

Some of us who can remember "way back" feel an almost hysterical desire to laugh and cry when we see this "born dancer" trained down to our awkward ambling; this "born singer"—with all the unerring sweetness of his singing "educated" out of him—displaced by raucous tone and false harmony; this "born actor" and dramatic story-teller, with the great drama-tragedy of his own life untold, playing down to the level of a cheap Vaudeville audience.

Is it gone forever with its inspiration for all, the art of beautiful expressive movement, that "shadow-dance" round the flaring beach-fire reflected in dark moving curves and lines upon the snowy sands? . . . the lithe body swaying like a light bough in a tepid breeze . . . then suddenly frantic, grotesque as the antics of these same tree-limbs, bared, distorted by southern tornado, with flashes of passionate movement like hot lightnings searing through! . . . then, suddenly again, calm—rhythm—ecstasy?

Or that colorful "baptizin'" in the clear brook at the foot of that Alabama hill! Before you see the worshipers you may hear their hymn—wild, poignant, beautiful—one leading unseen tenor singing out his soul to God and the marching chorus responding in perfect time and harmony. It is as if some minstrel-poet of the old Bible led them and the sonorous refrains of the old Psalms rang out again upon the everlasting hills. . . . And now their leader stands there in the sunlight at the top, a prophet done in bronze! a great old man with

flowing beard and long staff in his hand . . . and as he descends they mount, two by two, descend and follow him—a dark, white-robed procession, singing as they march, the sunlight touching here an ecstatic up-turned face, there a slender brown arm that waves above their heads. With the green background, the glittering sky above, the scene is unforgettable and rouses an emotion that seems to have slumbered in us long.

Then, at other times and lighter hours, the home and plantation songs and dances, laughter and uproarious hilarity. The contagion and hypnotism of the "Juba" dance with its endless repetition, and the "patting" hands like rain upon the roof, timing faster, faster, till the exhausted expert sinks to rest. . . Real fun and humor, humor always: that precious gift that makes him smile through tears, lightens his darkest hours, gives him a philosophy of patience, a truly Christian science in its simple following of the golden rule.

Yet, in a civilization so insincere and unsympathetic as ours is become, it may be that this very grace of humor has been his undoing. Because it hinders him from taking himself with that exaggerated self-importance that we mistake for racial superiority, we cannot see him as really the greater for that fact. We climb upon his back and shout that we are higher than our patient bearer; but, as he stoops thereunder. . . I shouldn't wonder if he knew the joke was on *us* all the while, and in his soul looks humorously at the Creator—and God smiles back at him and makes his burden lighter from the top!

He has suffered for our sins; but we shall suffer more, artistically at least, if we do not gain perspective before we have quite wasted him, to see him not only as a "man and a brother" but as the most precious "material" that ever dullards overlooked. Let us no longer exploit him as a dark background for our tawdry jokes and out-worn sentimentalities that do not hide the ugly nakedness of our injustice.

Even now and here in "little old New York" there is an occasional oasis in some Negro church where, with our outer wrappings, we may "rest" our souls and hear some sinner bare his own as simply, as shamelessly, as greatly, as ever Greek before the altar of his gods. And when some "sister" in contrast to our religious indifference is made "happy" by the intense rapture of her worship and dances up the aisle to the baptismal tank with the wild gestures and cries of some pagan priestess, and the whole congregation bursts spontaneously into a hymn of praise—we feel our sluggish heart-beats quicken in sympathy and pure artistic pleasure!

And the preacher's sincere love of God and hatred of the Devil bring them alive and very near in both hope and menace. He may begin quietly, conventionally; but very soon the faith in him flares up in burning words, poured forth in growing cadence as his emotion gets beyond mere prose expression, and he begins to chant in a regular refrain—until his congregation, hypnotized, catching fire, beats time with hands and feet, . . . when an inspired voice among them starts an old hymn and such singing is heard as makes the ordinary choir seem but a mechanical record of our inexpressiveness!

The Negro's "revival" is as far in the other direction, away from Billy Sunday's cooked-up theatricals and the vulgar imitation of his dramatic effects. The Negro does not make God his mouth-piece for filthy language and hard denunciation of those sins of the poor that are most injurious to the commercial interests of the rich! He loves Him so simply, so devotedly, is so sure of his understanding in a world that has been so bitterly unsympathetic that he loses at times all consciousness of anything but his own tragic need. . . and he speaks to Him in language no less worshipful because direct and simple, often humorous. But often under the humor are vital truth, deep philosophy, keen satire, knowledge of men. And in the lighter form it never fails to "get over" into the minds of a sympathetic audience:

"An' Gawd call Moses up ter Mount Sinai ter fetch de Tin Commandments" said the preacher. "But Moses *know* de *chillun* er Israel, an' he go up mighty slow-footed. But at las' he get dere, an' de Lawd hand 'em to him outen a cloud, an' He say 'go on an' tek 'em down now, Moses, an' watch out you don't brek 'em!' But Moses he kinder hang back, an' de Lawd say agin: 'ain't you hyar me tell you to go on down, Moses? I see de *Chillun* er Israel is got dat Golden Calf mos' sot up eready.' Den Moses hist de Tin Commandments on his back an' start on down; but he go kinder grumbly, an' he say: 'O Lawd! don't lak ter take no chances wid dese hyar Tin Commandments, case dey so hefty, I mought slip up on 'em my own se'f', he say, 'an' de *Chillun* er Israel is sho' to smash 'em all ter bits. Case you knows yo'se'f it a heap easier to follow a Calf—an' a Golden Calf at dat—den ter star' right *sqar on* de Tin Commandments, an' not, anyways, crack 'em!'"

And speaking of the Baptism of Christ he said: "An' when Christ was growed a man (an' none er your two-by-fo' men needer) he got up in de cyarpenter shop one day an' he tuk off his apern (I reckon seein' as He was a cyarpenter, he mus' a wore a apern) and He went out and clumb a high mountain, an' when he come ter de top he look over an' see de dawknness er de Wilderness way down below on de yudder side, an' all de *Chillun* er Israel was crowded way down dere in the blackness, an' Jawn de Baptis' was wid 'em. An' when Jawn look up an' see Jesus standin' on the Mountin' Top wid de light all roun' him, he call him, an' Jesus come on down inter de Wilderness wid de light follorin' him. An' Jawn take Him inter de river Jurdan; an' all de crowd stan' still in de dawknness, lookin' on. An' all of a suddin, while Jesus an' Jawn wuz standin' togedder in the water, side by side, de heavens done open! de sky shine clar out! de Dove fly straight down outen it, an' light plumb! on Jesus' shoulder. An' when Jawn look up an' see all dis, he say: 'It sho' look mo' lak you babtizin' *me*, Jesus, den *me* babtizin' you!' . . . ."

And since the church is still largely the Negro's social and intellectual centre, the meeting-place for even his political and economic discussions, one may hear real oratory there and that "truth in a nutshell" which seems the secret of dramatic effect.

Sometimes he puts democracy in a sentence, as when he cries: "I don't believe in no *segergation*—male nur female—black nur white!" And Brother Babtis' sums up the deadening influence of sex and race egotism on art and liberty when he says:

"De white man say de Woman all right—when she know her place. But *he* want to *place her*. An' he say: 'A Nigger all right when he know *his* place; but *he* want to "place" *him*, too!'"

Rosalie M. Jonas

## COLERIDGE

Could I but win to those fair heights and far  
Where dwell the by-gone Majesties of Song,  
And choose that bard of all the tuneful throng  
Who most to me is Fancy's avatar,

I would to Coleridge come, whose demon star  
Unlikest shines and loneliest along  
The laurel way, and for exquisite wrong  
Wrought me, unborn, and all who haunted are

Of glimpsed-at glories, I would to him bend  
And pray him pay the twin felicities  
He owes me still; and mid the asphodel  
Half Heaven would lean to hear his just amende,  
As, rapt once more in dream-born fantasies,  
He finished Kubla Khan and Cristabel.

William Hervey Woods